



# Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group



## Annual report 2014

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Europe Investing in rural areas.*





# Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group

## Chairman's Report 2014

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Our list of members shows more than 100 people. Although not all of them take part in our activities, we are always pleased to receive personal reports of wildlife sightings around the area from members and non-members. Perhaps the most exciting was the report of a White Admiral butterfly in Chelmick Drive (the first for several years), and in addition there were reports of Hummingbird Hawk-moths, Painted Ladies, Hedgehogs and Polecats.

You will see in the main body of the report many successes and a few disappointments arising from our activities.

Members have carried out a range of SACWG activities including surveying local wildlife sites, red grouse, swifts, hedgerows, churchyards, hedgehogs, butterflies and moths. We also joined in with the Great Stiperstones Bioblitz (Natural England), as well as wildlife training days organised by the National Trust (mammals, birds, trees and fungi). We attended the opening ceremony for the restored pond in Rectory Field and various talks organised by Shropshire Wildlife Trust, and we look forward to being more involved with Rectory Field and Wood when they become the responsibility of the Town Council.

Our bank account is quite healthy and we have spent wisely on training from experts.

We have had the pleasure of welcoming several Shropshire County Recorders and other "experts" who have joined in some of our activities and we are very grateful for their patience and for their help and advice.

You will see from the activity reports that, alongside the main groups studied, we have also recorded a wide variety of other animals and plants. The clearest indication of this comes from the Churchyard studies where not only were the plants recorded, but insects, mammals and bugs in general were recorded. Trees were studied and trunk diameters and heights were measured allowing comparison with older records.

I feel sure you will remember taking the children (maybe the grandchildren?) pond dipping and apart from the tadpoles and sticklebacks have wondered what on earth all those other things were wriggling around in the bottom of the net! Well, it is a bit like that when you "do" a churchyard and it is not only moths that you get in a moth-trap!

With the continuing development of digital cameras and phones with good cameras, it is now possible to take really clear photographs of insects wherever you are. We would like to see your photos and would try to identify the subject matter (not always possible) and the County Recorders would welcome records from different parts of the County. You can download your photos directly to the SACWG website. Why not give it a try?

We have discovered invertebrates which are new to Shropshire, found several species which are rare or uncommon, but more importantly perhaps, we have really enjoyed doing it.

*G J Wenman, Chairman*

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## 1. Introduction

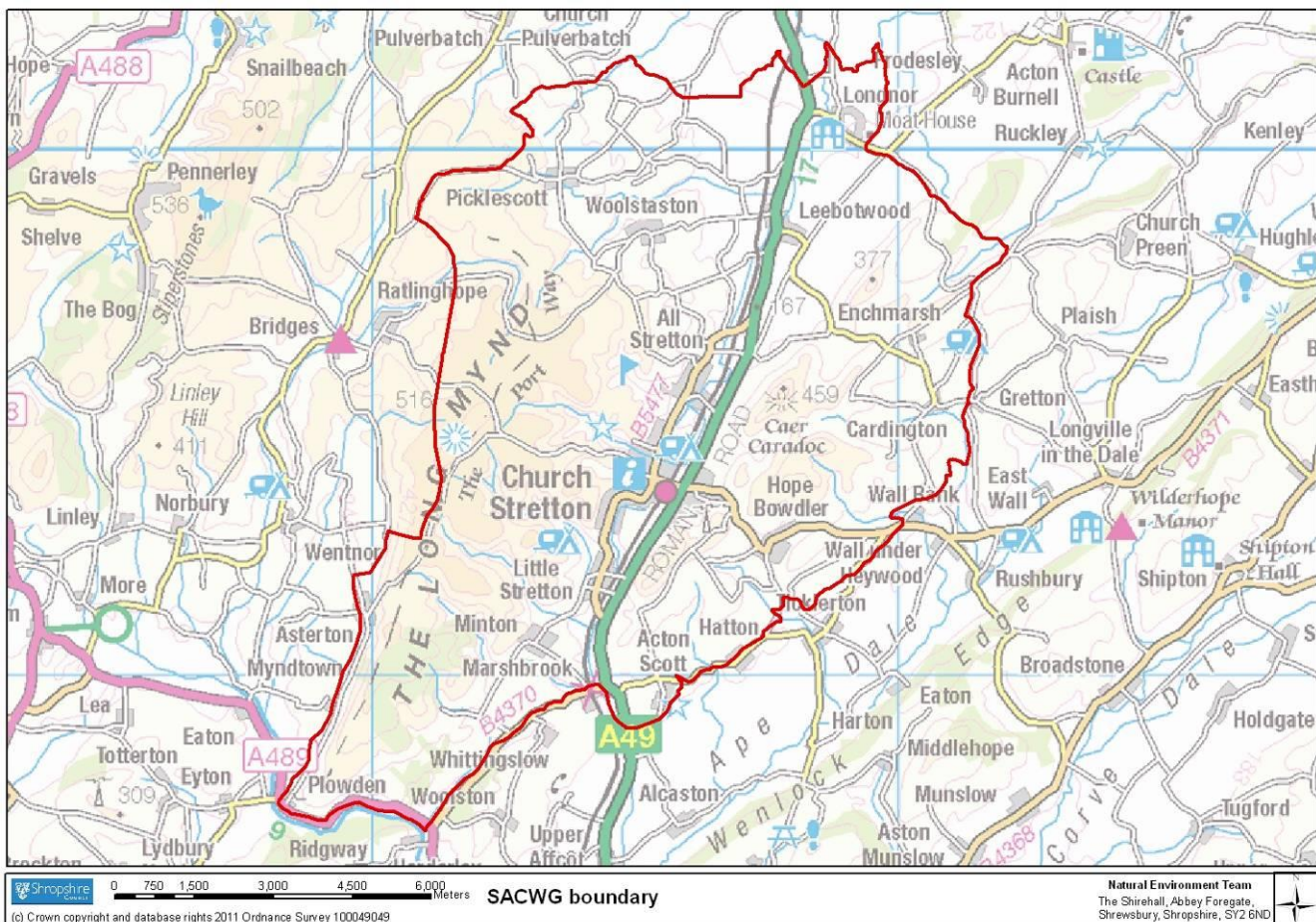
### 1.1 Community Wildlife Groups (CWGs)

Community Wildlife Groups bring people together to survey and conserve threatened local wildlife. They enable nature enthusiasts to make a real contribution to wildlife conservation in their local area and develop their own skills.

The groups are open to anyone who lives or works in each area, and who wants to actively contribute to local wildlife knowledge and conservation. They are for everyone, from experts to complete novices. Enthusiasm is far more important than detailed knowledge and initial training on identification and simple survey methods is provided. There are currently eight CWGs in the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), most developed and supported through a project funded by the Shropshire Hills AONB LEADER programme. For more information on these CWGs, visit the website [www.shropscwgs.org.uk](http://www.shropscwgs.org.uk)

### 1.2 Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group

The Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group (SACWG) was launched in February 2012, after consulting local groups and organisations. The group covers a broad area around the Stretton Hills. This boundary is not fixed, so activities can be extended according to the location of members and study subjects.



Map showing the operating area of the Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group.

During 2012 the SACWG was developed and co-ordinated by a steering group of local residents, led by Shropshire Council's Community Biodiversity Project Officer. Since 2013 the group has been co-ordinated by a committee, elected from the membership at the Annual Public Meeting. Survey activities are adopted by members at the Annual Public Meeting, on the condition that they meet the following criteria.

- Each activity requires a leader, who will be responsible for organising surveyors, ensuring that useful data is collected, distributing survey forms (if necessary), analysing data for the SACWG annual report and submitting records to Shropshire's County Recorders.
- The survey manager will be responsible for ensuring that any necessary training is provided. Ideally the training should be provided free of charge to ensure the sustainability of the activity.



Ponies on Wildmoor by P & J Howsam

On the Community Wildlife Groups website you will find that the SACWG has its own section, where you will be able to keep updated with survey activities and the latest discoveries. [http://www.shropscwgs.org.uk/?page\\_id=206](http://www.shropscwgs.org.uk/?page_id=206)

We would like to encourage all members to share their wildlife experiences and photographs. If you have seen something interesting or taken a nice wildlife photograph please let the web manager know by emailing [SACWG\\_Curator@shropscwgs.org.uk](mailto:SACWG_Curator@shropscwgs.org.uk). For those of you into social media, find us on Twitter @StrettonsWild or look for the Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group page on Facebook. You can use this to keep up to date with latest news, meet other members and share wildlife news.

Committee members and project leaders during 2014: Graham Wenman, Heather Hathaway, John Arnfield, Mike Shurmer, Caroline Uff, Leo Smith, Peter & Vivienne Thorpe, Kate Singleton, John Bacon, Peta Sams, Stuart Edmunds.

## 2. Survey activities and results

### 2.1 Butterflies

Project leader: Heather Hathaway

#### Introduction and aims

The Government has unveiled a new indicator for priority species – described by conservationists as the FTSE Index for threatened wildlife. The official statistic uses records dating back 40 years for 210 native species, including birds, bats, moths, butterflies, hares and dormice, to build a picture of the health of our wildlife. Butterfly Conservation Chief Executive Dr Martin Warren said: “The new Priority Species Indicator shows just how bad it is for threatened species, including over 200 butterflies and moths. We need a huge concerted effort and more serious funding for species conservation to turn this round.”

The following is an extract from the report by Joint Nature Conservation Committee. For the full report go to Butterfly Conservation website, Click News and Blog and then News archive 2013, FTSE Index

*Since 1976, the indices for butterflies strongly associated with semi-natural habitats (habitat specialists) and for those found in the wider countryside have decreased by 73 per cent and 36 per cent respectively. In the most recent year, 2013, habitat specialist butterflies increased by 9 per cent from the previous year, whilst wider countryside species increased by 29 per cent.*

The aim of the current project is to try and build a better picture of the diversity and numbers of butterflies in the Strettons area and highlight vulnerable colonies that may be threatened if their habitat is lost. The data collected will serve also as a baseline against which we can measure future changes in the butterfly population.

#### Methodology and results

This year people were encouraged to send in their casual records of sightings of butterflies seen in the area, from which a comparison could be made from observations made last year and to try to identify new areas where butterflies could be found within the area of the Stretton Area Community Wildlife Group. One transect was carried out and, with the results from this year, it is hoped to identify new areas for transects to be undertaken for next year. The following is from John Bacon who carried out the transect.

*A disappointing year. Of the 28 species recorded on the site only 2 species went up (Red Admiral and Speckled Wood); 2 held their own (Small Heath and White-letter Hairstreak); with remainder having lower indices. For Common Blue, Small Copper and Six-spot Burnet Moths and other species the indices were some of lowest recorded over 9 years. The explanation?? Since the summer weather was pretty good (except for May) need to look at the winter! Possibly the exceptional wet winter from October 2013 to February 2014 when a succession of Atlantic storms gave 27.76 inches (694mm) of rain on my site in Shropshire. A year's rain in four months and with the ground saturated for weeks! Any overwintering eggs, larva or pupa must either have drowned or suffered fungal attack due to the wet and very mild winter. May 2014 was also very wet with 4 inches (97.5mm) of rain which would not have helped.*

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Many of the species found in the Church Stretton area are Biodiversity Action Plan species, some of high priority such as Wall, Grayling, White-letter Hairstreak, Small Heath and this year our first White Admiral recorded by Janet Guy in Chelmick Drive. Where there is one there must be more! Eight observers have sent in their recordings and have identified 29 species in total, the same total as last year, but not the same species. No Marbled Whites or Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries were recorded this year.

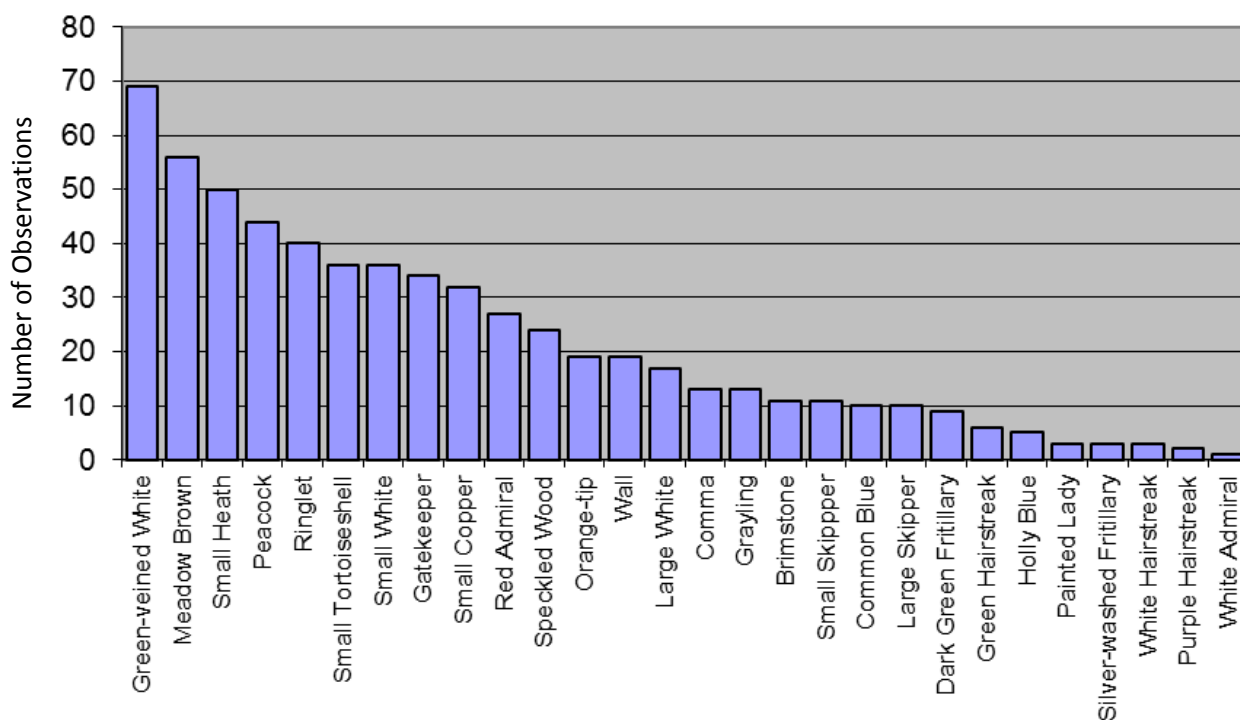


White Admiral



Brimstone

The graph shows how many times any one species was recorded. Several species were recorded in large numbers, including Gatekeeper, Green-veined White, Meadow Brown, Ringlet and Small Skipper. Only one Dingy Skipper was reported, just outside the Strettons Area, and that was at Lodge Hill.



Thanks to all those who participated: J. Guy, C. Wellings, C Uff, P. Branson, T. Oakely, J. Bacon, H.Hathaway, J. Roger

### 2.2 Hedgehogs

Project leader: Stuart Edmunds

This year, progress was made on the Strettons Area hedgehog survey which had laid dormant during 2013. Investment was made in purchasing 7 hedgehog tunnels from the Mammal Society, which would be used in determining hedgehog presence at several sites around the Strettons.

The national-standard hedgehog tunnel survey was devised by Nottingham Trent University in conjunction with Peoples Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) as a cost effective way of showing up signs of hedgehog presence and estimating the relative abundance of hedgehogs in a given area. Previous surveys run by Universities had involved the live trapping of hedgehogs which was deemed too intrusive and stressful to the subjects. The hedgehog tunnel survey is considered unobtrusive.

Tunnels are made from Correx plastic sheets, cut into triangular tunnels to allow access to wildlife. A base plate is inserted into the tunnel holding two sheets of plain paper, some hedgehog bait and two lines of non-toxic oil-based poster paint. The food left in the tunnel as bait attracts a mammal into the tunnel where it walks on the paint to leave clear footprints on the paper.

In April, the first hedgehog tunnel training session was held with 8 volunteers in All Stretton. Participants were given a tunnel each to use in their own gardens for a week to see if hedgehogs are still present. The national hedgehog population is said to have declined by as much as 70% since the 1960s, due in part to habitat loss and increased road casualties and it is likely that this would also be the case in this part of the county. Historic records on the Strettons area indicate that hedgehogs have been seen here in healthy numbers up until the 1990s, but records may reflect a lack of recording in recent years.

Early indications in April were positive as hedgehog droppings were found on the lawn of the training venue. However, no hedgehog footprints were left in any of the tunnels during the period that the tunnels were deployed. There were however a few isolated reports of hedgehogs from members and the general public, particularly around All Stretton. Other mammals were recorded: wood mice and field vole footprints were found in most of the tunnels in huge numbers, for example.

The aim of the survey was for SACWG members to pass the tunnels onto other volunteers to use in their gardens. But with such disappointing results, it is recommended that in spring 2015, tunnels should be left out in higher concentration to increase the probability of use by hedgehogs, following the most recent guidelines from the PTES.

### 2.3 Hedgerow Survey

Project leaders: Peter and Vivian Thorpe

Only a limited number of hedgerows were surveyed during 2014, due largely to a lack of volunteers. Two days of surveying were carried out in the Stone Action – Cardington area to introduce two new volunteers, Janet Martin and Don Hale, to this activity. Follow-up training was provided on inputting the information collected into the project database.

Additional volunteers are needed if the activity is to continue. Hedgerow surveying is an activity that can be carried by a couple of people or by a group and can be done anywhere in the SACWG area at any time that is convenient. However, it is usually better to carry out the surveys during those months when the hedges are in leaf to assist in identification. Further information and training can be provided by Vivienne and Peter Thorpe ([vjandp@btinternet.com](mailto:vjandp@btinternet.com) 01694 771443).



### 2.4 Moths in YOUR Garden

Project leaders: Graham Wenman and Mike Shurmer

In 2014, we only managed to visit four gardens. Nevertheless, the results from these visits were of significant interest.

In summary, the following table shows the total number of moths caught at the sites and the number of species caught.

Date	Location	No. Moths	No Species*	Comments
30 May	Stretton Farm Rd.	Mike: 32 Graham : 103	32 (1) 45	Only 7 micro-moth species!
26 July	Leebotwood	Mike :120 Graham : 299	39 (16) 87	Over 400 moths, plus those that got away!
28 July	Chelmick Drive	Graham : 75	41	13 micro species
9 August	Burway	Mike : 28 Graham : 83	13 (8) 26	Nothing in the rain!

\*The number in brackets shows how many of the species in the trap were not repeated in the other trap.

#### Discussion

If we came to your garden and told you that there were about 2,500 species and millions of individual moths in the UK and then ran our traps in your garden and caught virtually nothing, it is unlikely that you would get very interested in them. So, the decision as to when we should start our surveys is difficult and is based on the results we are getting in our own gardens.

Thus, it was late in May that we ventured forth. This first site was chosen because it backs on to the wetland area bounded by Cemetery Road and the railway line and is different from those sites we visited in 2013.



Cydia illutana

In the early evening, as we set up the traps, there were lots of micro-moths flying in the late evening sunshine and so it was quite surprising that only 7 species were actually attracted to the traps – and there were only nine of them!

However, one of these was in fact, NEW TO SHROPSHIRE. This species (*Cydia illutana*) was first recorded in the UK in 1975 and is gradually expanding its distribution.



Oblique Carpet

In addition there were several moths which are relatively scarce and which were new to us. These included the Ochreous Pug and the Oblique Carpet.

Our second site, Leebotwood, seemed to be an unlikely spot for mothing, being at a house fronting the A49. However, the garden to the rear of the house was large, well-stocked with flowers, bushes and trees and also had a stream flowing through it.

It is clear from the results, as seen in the above table, that this was another very successful session. To catch (and identify) over 100 species at one session is a very pleasing result. Not only that, but there were several species that were new to us and in addition are quite uncommon. These included the Olive, a Large Twin-spot Carpet, and a few micro-moths which were new to us here.



Olive

Just 2 days later a trap was set up in Chelmick Drive. This site was chosen because of the report that a rare butterfly had been seen in this garden (a White Admiral). The site was fairly typical of many suburban gardens with a neat lawn and flowerbeds with a large field at the end and fairly dense woodlands nearby.

The catch was probably just what would be expected from such a location, with a selection of typical species across the range of colours and sizes to be found in moths, with the addition of woodland and meadow species, the Drinker and the Diamond-back Moth, an immigrant, being the pick of the bunch.

An early August visit to the Burway was slightly spoiled by the fact that it rained in the evening and it poured down all night and the next morning when we returned to inspect the catch.

Moths are, however, waterproof and more than 100 of them braved the weather and came to the traps. Considering the location, with wide open spaces surrounded by trees, bushes and flower gardens, plus the fact that it was mid-summer, the catch was disappointing. The larger moths recorded were nearly all of the commoner types but there were some more interesting micro-moths, *Teleiopsis diffinis* being the best.

We planned a session at Cardingmill Valley to coincide with "National Moth Night" (NMN) an annual event which takes place throughout the UK each year. (NMN takes place in a different month each year

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and targets different families of moth). However, the response from members was not sufficient to make our proposed event worthwhile and it had to be cancelled.

All in all, we were very pleased with the fact that we are recording new species and others which have not been recorded locally for several years. We hope to be able to visit more gardens in 2015 and to make second visits at different times of the year. Observations of day flying moths are also welcomed. This year a new site for the very rare (Nationally Scarce B) moth, the Argent & Sable, was discovered at Lodge Hill.

You will be aware that we also trap several times a week in our own gardens (and we have a third person running a light trap in the Strettons) and the “Moths in YOUR garden” surveys are meant to help us analyse the differences between different locations and habitats. Although we have not enough data yet, some patterns are beginning to appear. Beautifully manicured lawns and large gravel patches are clearly less productive than lots of trees, shrubs flowering plants and a bit of “wild”. Gardens “dedicated” to feeding Blue Tits are, naturally, less productive than those that don’t.

The new book “Micro-moths of Shropshire” published in December goes into much detail about habitats, altitude and much more, and the author (G. Blunt) has prepared an abstract for us which you can read in full on our website [http://www.shropscwgs.org.uk/?page\\_id=206](http://www.shropscwgs.org.uk/?page_id=206), but here is an extract from it:

*The Long Mynd and the Strettons have some of the best historical data for larger moths in Shropshire, but until recent years little work had been done on the micro-moths and it remained the county’s most under-recorded major locality for this group of Lepidoptera.*

*Fortunately the light-trapping surveys initiated by Graham Wenman and Mike Shurmer at SACWG have gone a long way to remedying the situation.*

*Many species that colonise Shropshire do so across the warm, dry lowlands before spreading into hill country. A good example is the Firethorn Leaf-miner *Phyllonorycter leucographella* that arrived in the Severn valley in 2004 and had spread into the Shropshire hills at Church Stretton by 2011. The Cypress Tip Moth *Argyresthia cupressella* turned up first at Shifnal in 2013, rapidly followed by one at Church Stretton only ten days later. But two new arrivals in Shropshire were discovered first in our area, namely *Psychoides filicivora* at Little Stretton in 2010, and *Cydia illutana* that Graham trapped at Church Stretton this year. The potential for monitoring the arrival or spread of other micro-moths into hill country in the Stretton area is great.*

Some of you have been part of that. We hope that we can make even more progress over the coming years.

With thanks to the moth surveys participants, J & A Freedman, J & D Hibbert, J & J Guy and Tony Jones.

### 2.5 Red Grouse on The Long Mynd

Project leader: Leo Smith



#### Introduction and aims

Red Grouse is on the amber list of UK birds of Conservation Concern (Eaton et al. 2009). The Long Mynd contains the larger of the two breeding populations of this species in Shropshire.

The National Trust implemented a monitoring programme of Red Grouse on the Long Mynd in 1994, based on dawn counts of calling territorial males in winter. The number of territorial males present has grown steadily since then, and in 2010-11 it was estimated to be 40-59 (Caroline Uff *pers. comm.*).

It was felt this method did not produce a sufficiently accurate population estimate for such a scarce species, or to assess the effectiveness of the Trust's heather management. A new survey

method was piloted in 2011, which aimed to map the territories of males displaying at dusk at the start of the breeding season. This approach produced an estimate of 60-63 territorial males, representing an improvement on the dawn count methodology. The dusk survey technique was repeated in 2012, when it was adopted by the new Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group, producing an estimate of 63 – 66 territorial males. The method produced excellent results, and it was decided to repeat it annually. The 2013 survey was affected by bad weather, and produced an estimate of 53-54 territorial males. It is not known whether the reduced estimate was due to fewer observations as a result of lower activity because of the weather, or a real reduction in the number of male Grouse.

#### Methodology

The 2014 survey was undertaken by 52 volunteers. Those participating for the first time attended an indoor briefing session in March, and four of them attended an “on the job” training session during an evening fieldwork survey. Sixty-seven watch points, selected to give a good field of view of a large part of the survey area, were identified, and marked on 1-10,000 Ordnance Survey maps. Each participant was allocated a watch point, and sent the relevant survey map and recording sheet. Participants used the map to record the location of all Grouse seen or heard, together with a number for each observation. This number corresponded to data entered on the recording sheet, which included time, description and number of individuals.

The project was disrupted by bad weather, but Surveys were eventually undertaken on seven evenings between 10 April and 15 May 2014, with 67% (45/67) of the watch points covered on at least three occasions. Twenty-one (31%) watch points were covered twice, and only one was covered once. This was a much better level of coverage than in 2013.

A full description of the analysis is provided in a detailed project report. It follows the territorial mapping method (Bibby et al, 2006), which uses concurrent observations of different birds exhibiting territorial behaviour (display flight or aggression) to estimate the number of territories.

#### Results

A total of 181 result sheets (137 maps with observations, plus 44 nil counts) were returned for analysis. These maps included 865 different observations of Red Grouse (some of which were concurrent observations of two or more birds). The coverage is summarised in Table 1, and compared with that of previous years. Coverage was much better than in 2013, and broadly comparable with the two previous years.

**Table 1. Summary of Survey Coverage and Results 2011 - 14**

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014
Total Number of Watchpoints	38	60	67	67
Number of Surveyors	48	67	40	52
Number of Counts	147	204	122	181
Average Number of Counts / Watchpoint	3.9	3.4	1.8	2.7
Number of Records	818	816	460	865
Average Records / Count	5.6	4.0	3.8	4.8
Counts with no Grouse recorded	12	51	26	44

Table 2 provides a breakdown of the results on each of the seven Survey dates

**Table 2. Summary of Observations of Red Grouse during the 2014 Long Mynd survey.**

Survey Dates	April				May			Totals		
	10	17	24	28	12	13	15	Counts	Records	Average
Total Counts	33	35	32	20	17	22	22	181		
Counts of Zero	12	16	2	0	4	3	7	44		
Total Grouse Records	108	59	297	136	74	136	55		865	
Average Records / Count	3.3	1.7	9.3	6.8	4.4	6.2	2.5			4.8

The mapped observations are summarised in Figure 1. There is not necessarily any correlation between the size and shape of territories shown on the maps and the area that each Grouse actually occupies. Many of the Grouse recorded could not be assigned to a territory with any degree of certainty, and the maps represent notional territories, based on those observations which approximately locate a boundary between territories.

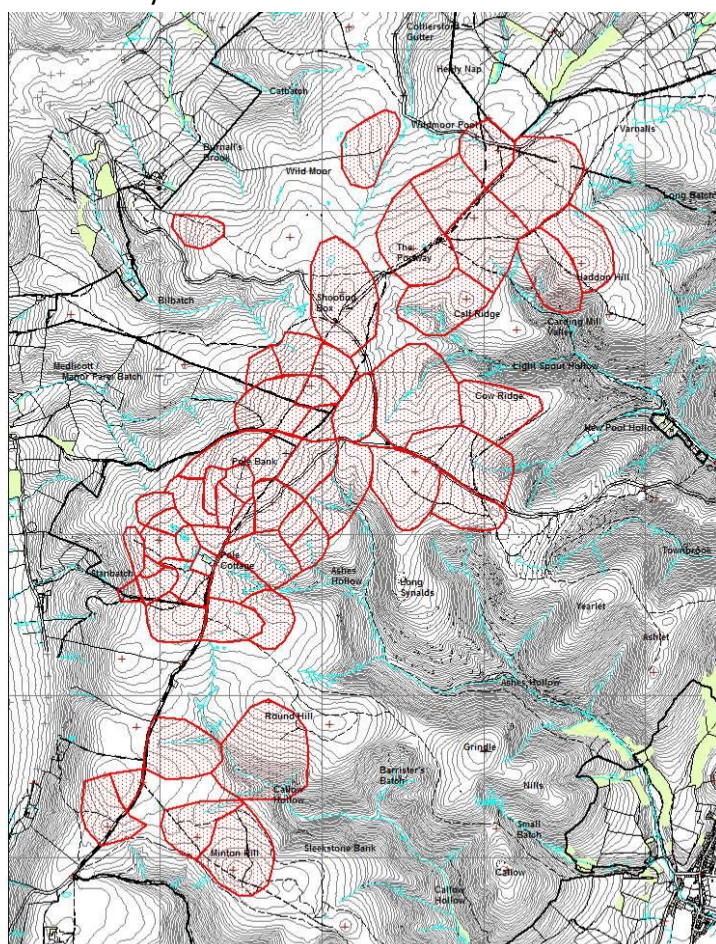
**The total number of territorial males estimated from analysis of the survey maps (56 -57), plus an additional casual record, gives a total population estimate in 2014 of 56 – 58 territorial males.**

Several participants had good views of other moorland species.

### Comparison with Previous Years

Table 3 provides a comparison of the population estimate for each of the four years of the survey

**Figure 1. Territories identified by the 2014 Long Mynd Red Grouse survey.**



**Table 3. Estimated Number of Red Grouse (Territorial Males) on the Long Mynd 2011-14**

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014
Population Estimate	60 - 63	63 - 66	53 - 54	56 - 58

### Heather Management

Approximately 700 hectares of heather dominated heathland is owned and managed by the National Trust on Long Mynd. Roughly 60% is actively managed by burning or cutting on a long rotation cycle of 16 years. Over the 10 years to 2012, around 160 ha of heather has been cut / burnt in scattered patches. Burning can only take place in favourable conditions during a limited winter period, and none was possible in 2013. A further 25ha was burnt in the spring of 2014. This aims to add structural diversity to the heathland, whilst maintaining heather as the dominant species

This practice benefits a range of species, in particular the Red Grouse. The remaining 40% of heathland is left as 'non-intervention' to support less mobile species, which are negatively affected by burning or cutting. The detailed report includes a direct comparison between the territories and the heather management map. In general, most territories have some area of short heather in them. It therefore appears that the heather management has benefited Red Grouse.

### Discussion and Conclusions

The level of Red Grouse activity varies with weather conditions. The likelihood of them being observed and recorded depends on good conditions, but also on good coverage of all Watch Points.

The number of participants, the number of counts, and the prevailing weather conditions all affect the total number of records, and, more importantly, the number of observations of two male Grouse seen or heard concurrently which are needed to define territory boundaries. Therefore it is not possible to make detailed comparisons between the maps produced each year, because they reflect the variations in coverage, and the methodology, which does not produce a map of the actual occupied territories. Also, there will be some rearrangement of territories each year, as the burning, and further growth of the mature heather, both lead to areas becoming unsuitable for Grouse.

Coverage in 2014 was better than in 2013, but it appears that the population did actually decline in 2013, and partially recover in 2014. The Survey will be repeated in 2015, and will hopefully show a continued recovery and upward population trend.

**Participants** Thanks to: John Arnfield, Katherine & Pauline Baggott, Steve Baker & Brenda Crosby, John Bent, Lesley Brown, Chris Cooke, Mags Cousins, Tim Davanney, Sylvia Davidson, Vince Downs, Mike Flavell, Jeremy Freeland, Julian French, Helen Griffiths, Jonathan Groom, Richard Halahan, John & Anne Hanley, Heather Hathaway, Frank Hinde, Ruth Holmes, David Holmes, Alison Hopewell, Jane & Tony Howsam, Peter Howsam, Peter Jackson, John Knowles, Liz Knowles, Simon Lovell, Anna McCann, Andrew Middleton, Jim Mitchell, Stephen & Margaret Mitchell, John Morgan, Peter Nicholls, Josie Owen, Dave Pearce, Sam, Hannah, Joseph & Esther Price, Barry Raynor, Simon Sholl, Mike Shurmer, Leo Smith, Mike Streetly, Caroline Uff, Tom Wall, Heather Williams, David Woodhouse, and John & Helen Worrell.

**A Detailed Report** with a full description of the methodology and analysis has been prepared *Red Grouse on The Long Mynd: Survey and Population Estimate 2014* (Smith 2015), and given to participants. It can also be viewed and downloaded from the Community Wildlife Groups website, [www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk](http://www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk)

## 2.6 Swifts in the Strettons

Project leader: Peta Sams

### Summary

There are good numbers of swifts flying over the centre of **Church Stretton**. Two significant areas around the town centre have been identified as hot spots for swift nest sites - 19 nest sites have been located in and around High Street and Church Street. These sites are, as would be expected, in older buildings that have useful nooks and crannies for the birds to build their nests in. They also have clear flight paths into the buildings and screaming parties of up to 14 birds were frequently seen along the High Street quite often at head height.

There appears to only be one house in **All Stretton** that now has swifts. Installing suitable boxes and call systems in appropriate neighbouring properties could help to rebuild the colony here.

Again, in **Little Stretton**, swifts were only found at one location and this was hard to access. Trying to extend the colony size here could be worthwhile as both these villages would seem to be in danger of losing swifts altogether. Swifts usually breed in colonies with several nest sites in a small area. The presence of only one nest site in each of these villages is of concern as once lost it is hard to attract birds back to an area.

Looking for swifts going into nest sites can be time consuming but, now that the main sites have been identified in 2014, it is suggested that these are checked to see whether the birds continue to use all the sites each year. New sites may be found but they are likely to be in the vicinity of sites located this year. The Shropshire Council planning portal will show planning applications for any proposed work on buildings known to house swifts and it is recommended that a comment is submitted to ensure that the planners are aware of this and suitable provision made for the nests to be maintained or mitigating measures taken. Other works that either need Building Control or no consents are harder to monitor and it will be for members of the Group to make residents, builders and scaffolders aware of the presence of swifts and to act accordingly and within the provisions of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, which protect the birds and their nest sites during the breeding season. Regrettably this protection does not extend outside the breeding season and it is for the Group's members to persuade property owners that retaining swift nest sites is important.

Although slightly outside the focus area, it is worth recording that nest sites were found on Cwm Head Church, and there is a strong possibility that swifts also nest on the churches at Cardington and Hope Bowdler. These observations were made during SACWG's Churchyard and Burial Ground survey. Churches are an increasingly important refuge for swifts and working with the parochial church council, or other group responsible for the church, is important as they are often unaware of the birds and the steps needed to conserve these important colonies.

### Objectives

Swifts have been observed in and around Church Stretton for many years but although some residents are aware of some nesting sites that are, or have been, used there has been no formal recording of the location of nest sites or the number of birds. Anecdotally the numbers of birds in Church Stretton are

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stable although the numbers in the outlying villages All Stretton, Cardington and Little Stretton are believed to have declined in recent years.

Swifts are an amber listed species and it is thought that the loss of nest sites due to modern building methods and materials have played a key part in their decline. By recording known nest locations it is possible to monitor whether these sites continue to be used in subsequent years, whether more sites are used and, importantly, liaise with residents, builders and planners when works to improve properties is carried out. Surveying also indicates where it might be worthwhile installing artificial nest boxes to increase colony size – the birds are sociable and tend to nest within close range of each other. The location of any nest sites recorded will be passed to Shropshire Council, Church Stretton Civic Society, RSPB swift survey and the county bird recorder.

### Method

Swifts return from Africa at the start of May and as the breeding season is short find their nest sites within a few days of arrival. From May to the start of August the breeding birds can be observed going to nest sites at sunset. Also, they can be seen returning to nest sites throughout the day to feed young from mid-June to early August. In good weather they may return several times an hour whereas in poor weather, when the search for food takes longer and involves trips further from the nest, less frequent visits to the nest are observed. A weekly Swift Watch meeting was held, weather permitting, from the end of May to the end of July. The group met around 30 – 45 minutes before sunset and a different area of town was visited each week. During the main feeding season members of the group also saw swifts at nest sites during the day time. Some surveyors focussed specifically on All Stretton and Little Stretton and some ad-hoc reports from residents and also those living further away were received.

### Findings

- The swifts arrived somewhat later than expected in 2014 – the first birds were not sighted until around the 6th of May which is a week later than usual.
- After a wet start to the season the weather then settled and for all of the main breeding season the weather was warm and neither excessively wet or windy.
- Swift Watch started at the end of May and quickly identified that the High Street in the area close to the Market Square is a real hot spot for swifts in the town. The birds were not going into nest sites until sunset – or even after – and on the Market Square they were active until well after 10pm even in early June. Perhaps the nearby street lights gave them sufficient light to return to nest sites later than would have been expected.
- Screaming parties of 12 – 14 swifts were regularly seen along the High Street close to the Market Square.
- Groups of up to 40 swifts were frequently seen around the Easthope Road area and it is thought that many of these were non-breeding birds as they appeared to drift off and up and not come to nest sites in the town.



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- A couple of nest sites were found on the High Street at its junction with Lion Meadow.
- Another hot spot was found in Church Street with swifts seen going into many of the properties in this terrace of Victorian houses.
- A single nest site was also observed in Easthope Road and reports were received of swifts nesting in Lutwyche Avenue.
- There were reports of swifts east of the A49 near the nursing home and on a nearby house but there was no sign of any birds on the evening the Swift Watch group visited.
- Swifts were seen between Hazler and Ragleth Hills – presumably feeding.
- Although many swifts suddenly departed on the night of Saturday 26th July (this happened across the whole country) there were still reports across Shropshire of some birds still at nest sites. Presumably they were feeding late young and reports were received well into August of activity at some of the nest sites on the High Street. The latest recorded data a swift was seen in Church Stretton was 9th August.
- Late in the season, when the young are fairly well grown, droppings can frequently be seen under nest sites – and this is a useful confirmation of successful breeding. However droppings are not always present so lack of droppings does not mean no young. The left hand picture below shows droppings widely dispersed across the pavement under a nest. The right hand picture shows an abundance of droppings on a roof under a nest site.



Thanks to everyone who came out to look for swift nest sites and who sent information to the group. Special thanks to John Arnfield, Isabel Carter, Heather Hathaway, Tony Jones, Janet Longstaff and Gay Walker

### 2.7 Churchyards and Burial Grounds

Project leader: Caroline Uff

#### Introduction and methods

This project aimed to bring together members of SACWG with different wildlife interests in order to conduct surveys of local churchyards and burial grounds. Such sites are often extremely important refuges for wildlife and it is often the local churchyard that retains some of the best examples of flower rich grasslands that were once typical of the area. We found that all the sites surveyed provided sanctuary for wildlife, from hedgehogs and swifts to slowworms and rare bees. One was carpeted in orchids, and nearly all had grassland species typical of old flower rich meadows.

Nine sites were visited: St. Lawrence's, Church Stretton; The Old Cemetery, Church Stretton; St. Michael's and All Angels, All Stretton; Greenhills Cemetery, Church Stretton; St. Margaret's, Acton Scott; St. Michael's, Smethcote; St. Michael's and All Angels, Cwm Head; St Andrew's, Hope Bowdler and St James', Cardington.



Cwm Head Church

For most sites, plant species were recorded from a general walk-over as well as 2x2m square plots to help determine the type of grassland. The information was also used to trial the 'burial ground botanical companion' being developed by the charity Caring for God's Acre. Trees were identified and their girth and condition assessed. Any birds seen or heard at the site and signs of nesting were recorded. A baited hedgehog tunnel was left for two nights to collect small mammal footprints and felt roofing tiles also left out for about a month as a refuge for reptiles. Sweeping and beating of vegetation was used to help find invertebrates. Sketch maps of the each site were produced showing the position of trees and key features, and where previous surveys had already been done these were updated.

Staff from the charity Caring for God's Acre joined SACWG members for some visits, as did some botanical and invertebrate specialists. A report of the findings was given to the churches/cemeteries

along with advice on looking after the species recorded where appropriate. Caring for God's Acre offered to provide practical help with churchyard tasks that would benefit wildlife.

### Results and discussion

Full reports for each visit are available on the SACWG website, but the highlights are summarised below.

**Ground Flora:** The most outstanding site botanically was the tiny churchyard at Cwm Head, with an estimated 700 spikes of common spotted orchid as well as range of other uncommon species such as



Orchids in Cwm Head churchyard

twayblade, devils-bit scabious and quaking grass. A close second, and the most floristically diverse, was Acton Scott with 70 plant species recorded with areas of both rich grassland and woodland flora. Both of these sites were largely left uncut during the summer, allowing plants to flower and set seed but in both sites, path sides were kept trim to ensure good access and a cared-for appearance. Most of the other burial grounds visited had managed to retain at least a small uncut area, and it was from these that we were able to get a glimpse of the wild flower potential of the sites. In many sites, grassland flowers, such as harebell at Hope Bowdler and pignut at Smethcote, persisted despite a close regular mowing regime in that area. Providing grass clippings are removed, such species are able to survive mowing for quite a few years, but if clippings are left these much loved flowers will soon be lost.

**Trees and Shrubs:** Most of the sites had a mixture of native and ornamental trees and shrubs, often planted in groups which maximise the benefit for wildlife. However the most striking were inevitably the yew trees, recorded in all of the sites except Greenhills Cemetery. The shady pathway to Hope Bowdler Church is flanked by mature Irish Yews to striking effect, but perhaps the most stunning were



Yew Trees, Hope Bowdler

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those at Acton Scott (recognised and documented by the Ancient Yew Group) with one magnificent specimen having a girth of almost 7.6m.

**Birds:** Three of the Churches visited had nesting, or possible nesting, swifts (see Swift Survey introduction), but perhaps the best general site for birds was Greenhill's cemetery. When arranging the survey, the local grave digger mentioned to me that a visitor had told him how lovely it was to watch the birds in the cemetery. We were not disappointed and recorded 18 bird species including nuthatch and great spotted woodpecker both nesting in holes in the boundary trees.

**Mammals and Reptiles:** The hedgehog tunnels revealed the presence of mice/voles on nearly all sites, but no hedgehogs, (although hedgehog droppings were found in St. Lawrence's churchyard). A set of footprints from Hope Bowdler Churchard appear to be those of a polecat. It was wonderful to record a slowworm from All Stretton Church, a species rarely seen these days.



Slowworm

**Insects:** The Old Cemetery produced 2 particularly noteworthy finds. The caterpillar of the Scarlet Tiger Moth was found feeding on green alkanet the adult of which was first recorded in Shropshire by G.Wenman the previous year. A felt tile (left out for reptiles) became a shelter for a group of bordered shieldbugs, an uncommon burrowing species which feeds on cleaver. A nationally scarce soldier beetle, *Cantharis obscura* was a great find in All Stretton churchyard.



Scarlet Tiger Caterpillar

Another nationally scarce insect, the solitary bee *Stelis punctulatissima* was recorded in Cardington churchyard along with its host, the carder bee *Anthidium manicatum*.

In summary, our local churchyards and cemeteries were shown to be extremely important for wildlife. Leaving sunny areas of grass to flower and seed before cutting, and always removing all grass cuttings are two key things which help keep the wildlife richness of the site. It not only allows the wildflowers to thrive, but provides nectar, food and shelter for animals. Other important wildlife havens were dense clumps of shrubs, old trees and walls.

Thanks to all those who participated: Nick Robinson, David John, Frank & Frances Hay, Gay Walker, Graham Wenman, Ian Cheeseborough, Janet Martin, Mike Shurmer, John Arnfield, John Bent, Isabel & Mike Carter, Heather Hathaway, Steve Butler, Keith Fowler, Jim Cresswell and Hilary Wallace.



Ian and Heather identifying Cardington bees

### 2.8 Wildlife Sites Botanical Surveys

Project leader: Kate Singleton

The botanical survey group visited 9 sites between April and August 2014. Each visit was led by Kate Singleton, Chris Walker or Fiona Gomersall. More details of each site are as follows:

#### Birch Coppice:

This is an acid woodland of native Sessile Oak, Downy and Silver Birches, Rowan and Holly with occasional Beech. Non-native Larch and Sweet Chestnut are also present. The woodland is growing on a steep north-westerly facing slope and parts of it have been quarried. A significant part of the north end



Common Cow-wheat

of the site contains a quarry face which is a Local Geological Site. The northern boundary is marked by an old stone wall. The woodland supports a number of bryophytes. The ground flora is species-rich and thick with Honeysuckle, **Bilberry (whinberry)**, **Wavy Hair-grass** and Broad Buckler Fern. Areas of **Wood Sorrel**, **Heath Woodrush** and **Hairy Woodrush** grow, particularly alongside paths and the roadside bank. **Climbing corydalis**, Greater Stitchwort, Wood Sage and **Bluebell** grow along the slightly banked path that runs along the southern boundary. (Plants listed in **bold** = "axiophytes" meaning good habitat indicators). Interestingly, the species found in this woodland are more commonly associated with woodlands at higher altitudes.

**Common Cow-wheat** (pictured) is a semi-parasitic plant which grows in patches along the roadside bank.

#### Lawley East

Our site survey shows this site to be a mosaic of predominantly wet rush pasture, bracken, gorse scrub and mixed woodland. There is also acid grassland and some small patches of heather and Bilberry (Whinberry).

The site is rich with axiophytes including: **Heath-grass**, **Wavy Hair-grass**, **Heather**, **Green-ribbed Sedge**, **Sphagnum moss**, **Star Sedge**, **Common Sedge**, **Carnation Sedge**, **Pill Sedge** and **Common Yellow-sedge**, **Marsh Pennywort**, **Slender St John's-wort**, **Heath Wood-rush**, **Purple Moor-grass**, **Creeping Forget-me-not**, **Mat grass**, **Lousewort**, **Devil's-bit Scabious**, **Bilberry**, **Wood Speedwell** and **Marsh Violet**. Other notable species found at the site were **Lesser Skullcap**, a perennial herb of flushes, springs, valley mires and boggy ground and **Sneezewort**, also found in flushes and wet pastures.

This type of wet habitat is also a declining habitat across the county and is very valuable to wildlife in itself. Cattle grazing on this site is ideal, however it is still suffering from gorse and bracken encroachment.

#### Lawley West

This is a well-known landmark and popular walking route in Shropshire. Botanically it comprises a large area of lowland acid grassland and bracken, with the eastern side being more interesting than the western side owing to the rocky outcrops and shorter turf. It was felt that although the site was

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generally in a good condition it was under-grazed and that the grassland is suffering from bracken encroachment. Notable species found include: **Spiked Sedge, Shepherd's Cress** (on the eastern side), **Slender Parsley-piert, Early Hair-grass, Bluebell, Wood Sorrel, Spring Sedge, Glittering Wood-moss, and Heath Speedwell.**

### Leamoor Common

This is a series of small pastures and meadows that are grazed by a horses or sheep (depending on the ownership). Many are species-rich (MG5) grassland and one includes **Green-winged Orchid; Moonwort; Southern Marsh Orchid; Quaking-grass; Yellow Oat-grass, Yellow Rattle;** Common Knapweed; Common Spotted-Orchid; Cowslip and Tormentil.

### Longville in the Dale

An area of wet grassland with associated wet woodland.

### Nutbatch (non Wildlife Site)



Round-leaved Sundew. Photo by F.Gommersall

A large, mostly acid flush running from Prior's Holt Wood through Nutbatch and at the base of Priors Holt Hill. The flush becomes more base-rich towards the end where it turns into a small stream. A large area of rush pasture adjacent to this provides a nice link with an existing Wildlife Site at Hamperley.

Interesting plants include **Round-leaved Sundew, Few-flowered Spike-rush, Sneezewort, Greater Tussock Sedge Star Sedge, Common Yellow-sedge, Flea Sedge** and **Carnation Sedge.**

### Cardington Hill

An interesting mosaic of acid grassland, wet flushes, small streams with willow flanks and deciduous woodland. The woodland wasn't surveyed. Bracken control using a horse-drawn roller will be carried out in June to help keep the areas of grassland open.

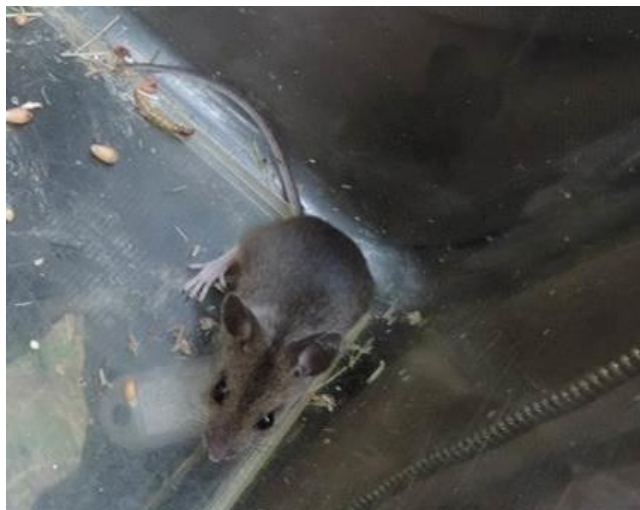
### Eaton Brook and Rushbury Station

These two wildlife sites are along the Eaton Brook. Although the botanical interest of the site was relatively disappointing, in terms of stream ecology it is still important and the stream supports among other things Otter, Bullhead and Stone Loach.

## 2.8 Other news

### Volunteer training

Kate Price led two small mammal trapping surveys at Carding Mill Valley in association with the Shropshire Mammal Group. Each day we collected 20 traps from two different transects; one in the garden and one in a small valley below the top car park. We caught 1 yellow-necked mouse, 1 bank vole and 5 wood mice on the first day and 1 yellow-necked mouse and 3 wood mice on the second day. Over the two days 32 National Trust, Community Wildlife Group and Shropshire Wildlife Trust volunteers came along and everyone had a great time!



In October we had a very popular and successful tree ID day led by National Trust volunteer John Tuer with 22 volunteers attending. The walk went up Carding Mill Valley and then to Rectory wood where we learned identifying features of numerous species as well as other interesting information about trees. After that we had an indoor quiz to test our knowledge and to learn how to use keys.

